

## Henry II in Ireland

Henry II, (1133-1189), King of England, was not descended directly from the previous Kings of England. He was the son of Geoffrey V Plantagenate, the husband of Mathilda of Scotland, who was the daughter of Henry I (Beauclerc). Thus Henry I was his grandfather on the maternal side. His mother was thus a claimant to the English throne, and as Henry was descended from the English Saxon kings, and also the kings of Scotland, he was an obvious candidate for the throne of England. He was born in Le Mans, in France, and went to England for the first time when he was nine, to continue his education.

He married Eleonor d'Aquitaine in 1152, and was crowned King of England in December 1154. Shortly after becoming King, Henry sent an ambassador to meet the newly elected Pope Adrian IV (the only English Pope), and the question of invading Ireland to "bring the Irish into the fold" soon presented itself. However, the plan to "invade" Ireland fell into abeyance for some time.

The relations between the House of Rotrou and the King of England deteriorated after the death of Henry I and his faithful friend Rotrou II. Rotrou II was forced to play a two-sided game with both the King of England and the King of France, and however delicately he played his cards, whenever the two kings came to blows, he always sided with King Louis. He felt the displeasure of Henry quite clearly in 1167, when all profits from his English possessions were paid into the Kings exchequer (see the "Pipe Rolls" of that period).

In 1166, the Irish question surfaced in a different way. In Ireland, King Diarmait Mac Murchada of Leinster was driven out of his kingdom by the High King of Ireland. He requested help from Henry, who was rather busy with problems in England at that time. Henry suggested that one of his followers could help to solve the problem, a certain Richard de Clare, 2nd Earl of Pembroke, nicknamed "Strongbow". Diarmait, as future payment to Strongbow, offered him his daughter Aoife in marriage and promised to make him heir to the kingdom.

Strongbow sent troops to Ireland, and finally went there himself. He quickly subdued Irish resistance in several cities, and Henry soon realized that Strongbow may be getting too big for his boots, but he had a small problem on hand in England concerning Thomas Becket, who had just been assassinated.

Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, constantly thwarted Henry's reformation plans, and drove Henry to say "What miserable drones and traitors have I nurtured and promoted in my household who let their lord be treated with such shameful contempt by a low-born cleric!". His closest allies heard his words, and set about resolving Henry's problem, simply by murdering Thomas. Henry must have spent the rest of his life regretting his words.

As Henry was already tied up with the "Thomas Becket" problem, some time elapsed before he could turn to the "Irish" problem, not because of the Popes injunction, but simply because Strongbow was becoming a problem. Finally, in October, 1171, he himself arrived in Ireland with a large force, to bring Strongbow to reason. Hugh de Lacy was in charge of the mercenary force of Henry, which included, among many other knights, Gilbert de Nogent and his brother Richard. The invasion of Ireland soon became reality, and was to last for more than 700 years. When Henry returned to England, he was unwilling to let Strongbow reiterate his conquests in Ireland. Henry gave a large part of Meath to his faithful follower Hugh de Lacy, with the title of "Justiciar" (Viceroy), allowing him to conduct all Irish decisions in his name, but with the exception of church matters. In this way did the De Lacy Barons receive large grants of land from Hugh de Lacy, inciting them to settle in Ireland.

Henry launched an important phase of castle-building to protect the captured territories. In Louth alone, more than 23 castles were built, although many were of the Motte and Bailey construction, and had limited use. Others were built in stone, not necessarily as defensive positions, but to show a hand of superiority and prestige, which was useful in the administration of the conquered territories. Henry left Ireland the spring of 1172, with several of his problems solved. In 1175 he agreed to the Treaty of Windsor, under which Rory O'Connor would be recognised as the High-King of Ireland, while giving homage to Henry in the vassal tradition. Whatever plans Strongbow nurtured when Henry returned to England were severely curtailed. Strongbow ceased to be a problem altogether, when he suddenly died in 1176.

Relations between the House of Rotrou and Henry improved after 1173. Geoffrey, the brother of Rotrou III was a witness to royal charters, and the English possessions were restored to the family. It seems that both Henry and Rotrou now understood the importance of working together, as their fathers had done previously.

Upon Henry's death in 1189, good relations were totally restored with the House of Rotrou, with the English possessions maintained as incentive to Rotrou, and with a close ally in France as incentive to Henry. Thus did several generations of the House of Rotrou and the Kings of England work together for a mutual benefit.

Henry died in July, 1189, and was buried in Fontevraud Abbey (Maine-et-Loire), France, after spending the last years of his life in trying to divide his lands between his numerous ambitious children.